

Title: Aceh-Malaysia-Vancouver: Settlement Among Acehnese Refugees Five Years On

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Research Question:

How are Acehnese government assisted refugees (now Canadian permanent residents and citizens) faring in Canada five years after arrival?

Importance:

Between 2004 and 2006, the Canadian government resettled 154 refugees originally from Aceh, Indonesia in Metro Vancouver. In some ways, they are representative of the majority of government assisted refugees (GARs) resettled to Canada since the 2002 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in that they arrived from a protracted refugee situation with relatively high settlement needs. In other ways, their resettlement was unique: they were the first group of refugees resettled entirely in one Canadian metropolitan area, they were the first Acehnese refugees ever resettled in Canada, and among adults, the gender ratio was disproportionately skewed towards (young, single) men. Ideally, the Canadian government, researchers, and/or service providers would trace the settlement outcomes of government assisted refugees from various countries over time, but such data is expensive to collect and challenging at the national scale. In a modest effort to fill this gap, we follow up on research conducted in 2005 to ascertain settlement outcomes in the areas of housing, official language acquisition, employment, and participation in Canadian society. While these findings are but a snapshot of social and economic relations among the Acehnese at the time, they offer the fullest available picture of how these GARs are doing; what their concerns, priorities, and challenges are; and what Canadian policies do to facilitate or hinder their aims as new Canadians and permanent residents.

Research Findings:

More than five years after their arrival, low levels of employment and official language skills persist. This affects many aspects of settlement, including the ability to come together in a community centre, the continued geographic concentration in Vancouver, and a sense that everyone will stay in Canada permanently. Family reunification policies are proving difficult to negotiate; spousal sponsorship is a particularly salient goal for the majority of men who are still single, and are working towards, saving for, and waiting for such relationships to materialize. In an upcoming working paper, we contend that such hopes combined with government policies impede integration aims. The decision to locate residences near one another has proven popular and is a factor in retention.

Implications and Policy Recommendations:

We outline fourteen specific policy recommendations to better facilitate post-IRPA GAR settlement. These include changes to the pre-departure orientation program, the Resettlement Assistance Program and its National Working Group, GAR spousal sponsorship, language training, and childcare. We also suggest the provision of community spaces and linguistic/ethno-specific official language training for "new and few" GARs such as the Acehnese.